

PIPPLEWISH
and the
Shaggy Scorpions



by Kelly Ishikawa

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Pipewish was created during the collision of given-up hopes. Through her, all forgotten dreams, abandoned intentions, replaced desires are allowed form.

Today, in a snowy, rocky, mountain city, in the middle of a blizzard, she put this faunomenon to use. The city faced a threat they had hoped was behind them—the great shaggy scorpions. They were thought exterminated, but now brought terror to the town that was overflowing with seasonal visitors expecting only beauty and recreation.

Pipewish was among these holidaymakers. She came to see the gleaming white hills, but also to marvel at the beings who had adapted to the extreme cold. Their forms were incredibly ill-suited to this place, but with creative coverings, customized conveyers, and mechanical snow-displacers they had found a way to thrive where nature would have refused them. She would not allow ruin by the frosty arachnids.

Monsters were easily met with monsters. How many children lacking the traveling benefits of meændearth outgrow their hopes of seeing real-life dinosaurs? If they only knew that, in this great universe, dinosaurs thrived on countless worlds, they might not have given up on those dreams. As it were, Pipewish could conjure the adrift asppiritions of great reptiles with ease. Several ceratops were suddenly present, ramming the scorpions, forcing them away from the people.

But these particular dinosaurs had trouble on the slippery streets. As they had done with the people of the town, the scorpions used their wide shovel-shaped tails to heave up great mounds of snow, and flung them onto the dinosaurs. Not light, powdery snow, but wet and heavy. It didn't take long for the dinosaurs to start struggling, especially when the scorpions packed the snow with their tails.

Then Pipewish saw an old man shuffling through the slushy streets. His name was Dr. Dawdul, and he said he was the key to getting rid of the scorpions.

Dawdul told Pipewish that these mountains were once abundant with a magnificent, magestic creature—the giant moose-antlered buzzard. When they were still here, they preyed on the shaggy scorpions. Dawdul's ancestors were original settlers of the mountain town, and told stories of how the antlered buzzards had guided them through terrible winters and brought them to the flourishing mountain lands where they could begin building a town. As a boy he got to see the buzzards before they had finally disappeared. He loved watching them circling in the sky, motionless. Their wings were incredibly well designed for soaring, and as a child, he believed that, even if they fell asleep, the winds would rise to hold them in the sky. They'd awake and see him watching from one of the town's square fields.

Dawdul devoted his life to reintroducing the giant birds to these mountains. He became educated in sciences and magics and traveled to far away worlds to look for solutions. Years went by without success. He had dreams of waking in the sky, seeing his town far below him, marveling that he'd been lifted through his sleep. He'd notice the large open parks where he used to watch the buzzards. Many times he'd thought was close to the answers. He'd been sure over and over that he'd found the right spells or insight. But he had failed again and again, enduring decades of disappointment, until finally, old and depleted, he had let his dream wane away.

Even with the rediscovery of cosmos-spanning meændearth, and the promise of more worlds to explore, he couldn't muster hope. Younger, abler magicians had taken up the cause. What was once a one-man crusade had become an officially sanctioned project, and an entire team of scholars from faraway lands were being paid to work out the problem of the missing buzzards. Still, no hope. He knew these people had no love for the great beasts or real

devotion to the work. They came for experience, for money, and would move on. The dream was dead.

And thus, an answer to the scorpions. He told Pipewish to use his deserted ambitions. The ceded fantasy of a sky full of antlered buzzards.

Pipewish agreed. She reached out with her mind to feel for the lost hope that awaited animation. She had to squint her eyes and shield herself against the blizzard, and she had to keep watch for the roving scorpions. It was hard to concentrate. Still, it should have been easier to conjure up the visions of vultures.

Dawdul called out and pointed. Across the street, through the flowing white snow a small boy could be seen, alone, and cornered by a scorpion! The boy covered his face as the scorpion's pincers clacked open and shut. Dawdul made a dash towards them, but slipped, struggling in a mess of grey sludge in the street. The pincers closed in.

Suddenly, the boy and the scorpion vanished! A large, ghostly whiteness seemed to obscure them, flapping furiously, holding even the blizzard at bay. It rose into the air, lifting the scorpion with it! Dawdul got up from the sludge. The boy looked up from where he had been cowering. Up in the air, rose the ghostly form of a great moose-antlered buzzard.

It was larger than Dawdul remembered. The gossamer vulture tore into the scorpion with its massive beak, and ripped it to shreds with its great talons. It flew off in search of more prey, and as all eyes tried to follow it through the storm, it became apparant that it wasn't alone. Shaggy scorpions were now being plucked from the streets, their empty shells cast aside in a feeding frenzy. Dawdul cheered and laughed at the tourists, who continued to panic. He knew they weren't in danger from the benevolent birds. He searched for more scorpions, so he could catch them being caught, and shook with excitement. But only carcasses could be seen. The buzzards were efficient—one of the things Dawdul admired about them. The blizzard let up, and the old man could see the boy far up a street, escorted by someone. The streets had been cleared of people. The sun came out on Dawdul, almost alone, if not for Pipewish, who sided up to him. She said she was sorry that the conjured buzzards could only stay a short time. That's the nature of her unrealized dreams. He gave the sky one last look, and said he was happy his longings had finally paid off.

Pipewish smiled and told him she had been unable to draw out any forsaken asppiritions from him. She pointed to a large window behind them. Dawdul saw the fear-stricken faces of the magicians that had been tasked with restoring the antlered buzzards.

After that, the town offered the job to Dawdul but he turned it down. Pipewish informed him that a great slab of meændearth sat in the rocky slopes of these mountains. She'd help him along, if he wanted. She told him it'd help if he'd close his eyes and let her guide him. Wind rushing up the mountainside gusted strongly past them. He wasn't sure he'd find any long-sought answers, or, even if he did, that his body would hold out for the trip home. But when allowed to open his eyes, he saw a sky that was a different shade of blue. The surrounding hills were bare of ice or snow. And far, far below, through clouds and mist, at the base of the mountains, a town with large square fields.